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Let's make it work

Bengalis have always been renowned for their astute political conscience and activism. During the Raj, Bengalis formed the backbone of the political and cultural establishment that led the British to leave the subcontinent. And then came the Pakistan era where politicians like Sher-e-Bangla, Maulana Bhashani, Suhrawardy and the great Bangabandhu had successfully challenged the might of an establishment made up of aristocrats, bureaucrats and a powerful military. The Bengalis founded their own nation as a people's state that enshrined democracy and secularism as fundamental principles.

Yet as tragic as it may be, Bangladesh today would betray to great extents the Bangladesh that had been dreamt of

during its emergence. With fifteen years of dictatorship and the last two years of quasi-military rule coupled with a notoriously corrupt polity, democracy in Bangladesh has never been able to institutionalise and deliver to its citizens, most of whom live in abject poverty. Even more pathetic is that the war criminals of 1971 still hold their influence and promote terrorism.

With the upcoming election being around the corner, my earnest appeal to all the stakeholders is to make sure that democracy is restored and sustained. Politicians must establish a functioning parliament and tackle corruption effectively.

Umrans Chowdhury
Student of Class Twelve
Scholastica



Maulana Bhashani addressing a public meeting.

AL's manifesto

Your staff correspondent's front-page report on AL's manifesto on 12th December appears reasonably pragmatic. However, completing it in their term of office, should they win, seems difficult. And if they are replaced by their arch-enemy BNP, come next election, then even the realistic goal of 5,000MW power by 2011 will disappear. The real life example is there when even their MoU for power plant was summarily cancelled in a very foolish manner, as soon as they were succeeded by the BNP. To top it, after that the BNP could not even add 1MW of power when they were in office. Maybe, now the BNP should opt for having the most modern automatic candle production factory in their manifesto! The fact is that at least the US and Canadian power plant makers are not interested in bidding in Bangladesh; and even if they do, they will add on at least 20percent "cancellation cost", to cover for sudden cancellations, without any rhyme or reason.

Regarding the other manifesto items like ACC, degree level free education, permanent wage and pay commission, trial of war criminals and one job per family-- all these could also be scrapped, once power changes hand.

Possibly jobs for youth and free education up to the graduation level; being touchy issues, may be continued by the BNP. However, they are bound to make the ACC weaker; so that they make hay when the sun shines, as they are addicted to skim milk and honey from all possible government expenditures!

Given this childish and immature outlook, particularly of the BNP, possibly short time and ad-hoc ideas should be framed on year to year basis; because given their past practice, whatever the AL does, the BNP has to undo it-- be it good, bad or indifferent.

To sum up, the "AL- BNP" can only be "All Legitimate- But Not Possible!"
Party watcher
Dhaka

A disqualified

FEMA
Election observers play an important role during election and various parties related to the field are greatly served by it. In this regard, FEMA has always carried out the job sincerely from the very beginning. But unfortunately the EC has banned the organisation from observing the polls, accusing its president

of involvement in politics.

It is my earnest appeal to the EC to permit the organisation to observe the polls, which will help to ensure a credibility of the election.
Maruf Zaman Kolloi
FH Hall, DU

Sound pollution

Sound pollution has reached an alarming stage. Experts have warned that excessive noise can lead to deafness and create health problems, which can do irreparable damage to humans.

We can reduce it if some steps are taken:

- The unfit vehicles should be banned.
 - The misuse of microphones must be stopped.
 - We should alert people about the dangers of it.
 - Law must be enacted to stop blowing of hydraulic horns in busy areas of the city.
 - We must realise the importance of peaceful life in domestic and public arena.
- Habibur Rashid Ismail**
Jamea Rahmania Fadiel
Madrasa
Choiyenarhat
Chittagong

Election Commission

The Election Commission appears to be feeble. The simple answer is-- stand on your feet and take a very rational and befitting decision regarding the constituencies where the court decision might jeopardize the election. If I were the chief election commissioner, I would immediately reschedule those elections without disturbing the election of the entire country. This is the most logical and legally acceptable solution under the present circumstances. I hope the Election Commission will take this decision.

As a bad precedence, I can refer to consecutive court orders to hold the upazila election in the past, but the government in power did not bother to carry out the orders of the court, and the court also did not apply its supreme authority to enforce its solemn orders. Unfortunately, we cannot comment on court orders.
A reader
One-mail

FEMA issue

That FEMA has not been allowed to observe the upcoming election really stunned me. The Election Commission has rejected the registration of FEMA on the ground of its president's connection with politics. But it is well known to all that he was associated with politics for a short period of time and

resigned from politics more than one and a half year back.

I am familiar with FEMA and this is the biggest election observing organisation in the country working with its very strong volunteer base.
Parvez Khulna

It is really shocking that FEMA, the biggest and oldest election observing organisation in Bangladesh, didn't get the permission to observe the upcoming election. This organisation is working in this area for many years. Over the period, FEMA has built a strong network across the country to observe elections fairly and accurately. Even internationally renowned election observation teams coordinate with FEMA.

As a conscious citizen of the country and having a clear idea about FEMA, I hope that EC will withdraw restriction and allow FEMA to observe the upcoming election.
Hasan Md. Mahmood ul Haque
Lecturer, SBA, PUB
Dhaka

Sayededa Jaigirdar's "London 1971"

May I point out that Mr Mohiuddin Ahmed included several inaccuracies in his letter of appreciation to Sayeeda Jagirdar in the letter column of The Daily Star of November 12, 2008.

The Bangladesh Government in Mujibnagar did issue a confidential letter to all East Pakistani officers serving in Pakistan Diplomatic Missions to continue on the roll of the Embassies concerned as long as they could.

The reason attributed was that the Mujibnagar Government could hardly afford to support them abroad due to paucity of foreign exchange.

Mohiuddin was then too junior an officer to know things of this nature. Did he know that a regular PFS officer who rose to the rank of Foreign Secretary in Bangladesh was on the roll of the Pakistan Embassy till 1st April 1971?

In those days of 1971 late Gaus Khan was President of the UK Awami League and was instrumental in mobilizing people and raising funds for liberation of Bangladesh. Sultan Sharif was also a follower of the Awami League, but not of Gaus Khan's stature, calibre and reputation.
M.A. Mannan
Uttara
Dhaka

Subcontinent

India was divided into two separate independent states under the 'Two nations theory' i) India for the Hindus and ii) Pakistan for the Muslims.

India and Pakistan achieved independence in 1947.

Thirty-four years after British rule (During the World War I the British ... invaded and conquered the Turkish Muslim Ottoman Empire including Palestine) in Palestine, Palestine was divided into two independent states i) Palestine for the Arab Muslims and ii) Israel for the Jews.

When India and Pakistan became two separate independent states in 1947, Bangladesh, the former East Bengal, legally and constitutionally became the part and parcel of Pakistan under the 'Two nations theory'.

But Pakistan ruled former East Pakistan/East Bengal now Bangladesh like a colony.

The people of former East Pakistan/East Bengal, now Bangladesh, protested and demanded their rights, and subsequently jumped into the war of liberation and won their independence after 24 years of Pakistani colonial rule in 1971.

But the fate of Kashmir, which both Pakistan and India claim, is still uncertain. When will the Kashmir issue be resolved finally?

OH Kabir
Hare Street
Wari, Dhaka

Leadership

We are an overcrowded nation, (an urban society); therefore it is not unusual that we have surplus 'leaders' -- no unemployment at the top levels of the society. Labelling is no problem these days. There are too many political parties (to have a piece of the pie); and too many mass media organs (daily newspapers and TV and radio channels). Why corruption is so popular? The antidote: extremist Muslims, using a wide range of cosmetic effects for social display (dress, mannerism, poise, motivations....).

Why no competition (no entry) at the top political hierarchies? How the CTG, since 1/11, has changed the outlook? It should -- that was its mandate -- clearing the debris before holding the general elections (now due on Dec 29). Time for a change (imitate the Yankees!). There are varieties of leadership signs and symbols. Some of our political leaders

Homage to Martyred Intellectuals

14th December is a red-letter day in the history of Bengali nation. Thirty-seven years ago on this very day the Bengali intellectuals were brutally tortured and killed by Al-Badr, Al-Shams killers who were the agents of Pakistani occupation forces. Their barbaric and heinous atrocities are comparable only with the Nazi killing of Jews during the World War II. It is a matter of great regret that these war criminals are not yet tried. It is the unequivocal demand of the people that these anti liberation forces be brought to justice without wasting any time.

Moreover, to keep the memory of our martyred intellectuals ever alive, the name of major roads and institutions of the capital city Dhaka should be named after them. Above all, by translating the dreams of the martyred intellectuals into reality we can show due respect to them.

Shaila Solaiman
Jahangirnagar University Campus
Savar, Dhaka



Professor GC Dev (R) being interviewed by a journalist (1967).

have been promoted from zero to number one slot (no time and space; no need of collective wisdom!). It is known as dynasty rule. Underdeveloped: the new nation and the new leaders. Some are stage actors. Some pay lip-service to public interest issues. Note the levelling of our roads (pot holes and wavy patterns) in the metropolis and elsewhere. But they harangue us on level playing fields! Our political sector, like the City Corp., needs a conservancy dept. Too many political epidemics due to accumulated political garbage.

What is the standard of politics in a have-not society? Misfortune worse compounded -- now face the two top Begums.

Who are these sycophants? What about collective responsibility of the top leadership? The politicians are above the law (the MPs are the lawmakers); forgetting that around half our population live below the poverty level. Where is the middle class, the real thinkers (and tinkers), of society? Stabilize this national backbone.

What is the relationship between communication gaps amongst the different levels of the society (economically and educationally) and corrupt political governance? This lethargy is environmental (the political greenhouse effect). Microphone oratory (gift of the gab, in which we Bengalees excel is not a demonstration of democratic practices). Rule with the heart, not theatrical gestures. Even inside the jails the VIP prisoners do not observe the

rules. Our politicians live in the past, and are too busy in the present (you know why); and leave the future to take care of itself. It is neither step-motherly nor step-fatherly treatment. It is the self-security syndrome (note that the dept stores have majority of imported goods). We need the outward look and empathy. When would our politics obtain the graduation degree?
Cynic Ali
Dhaka

Obama and the world

Mr Obama has been elected (or selected by Pentagon, FBI, Republican -- Democrat highest ups, limited to topmost people in the USA) as the 44th president of the USA. It is definitely creditable, especially for a Black to be elected as President of the USA. In fact, it is much more creditable if he has been selected by the tops of the USA as selection is totally on complex hard calculation, and no emotion at all.

We, the third world people, are feeling a bit sentimentally comfortable; but life in this world is not so simple, especially in cases where the only superpower is involved, things are much more difficult and complicated. Mr Obama has been elected? Selected as the USA President only to serve the USA and the USA alone to maintain its leadership in the world. The US interest is the only consideration, nothing else. We have nothing to rejoice and every-

thing to be concerned about and should be cautious.

The USA must have a difficult target. They need some front to do this nasty, harsh job -- Obama is the Front. It is difficult to predict what are the targets, but it can be said easily that things will not be pleasant for most of the countries, most of the people in this world.

We are so helpless, probably the whole world is helpless before the only mighty superpower -- the USA.
Mohammad Ali
Agargaon, Taltola
Mirpur, Dhaka

Bush and Iraq

President Bush's final trip to Iraq to say goodbye may not have been fairly the fond farewell he had in mind. Not everyone was greeting Bush as a great knight in shining armour during his secret visit. One Iraqi journalist Muntazer al-Zaidi decided to hurl his shoes at the Decider during a joint press conference Bush was holding with Iraqi Premier Nouri al Maliki. The surprise visit was planned to commemorate a security pact between the U.S. and the Iraqi government. But, at the end of the day, the president wound up having to dodge a pair of shoes thrown at him. This brave journalist has acted on behalf of billions of people worldwide. It is an irony that Bush wanted to leave office with a bang as the liberator of Iraq has to slink into Iraq and hide behind the Green Zone. On top of that he got a sent-off with a shoe!

The media reports that the journalist shouted in Arabic 'This is a gift from the Iraqis; this is the farewell kiss, you dog' and threw one of his shoes at the President, who ducked and narrowly avoided being struck. He had time to hurl his other shoe as well, before he was wrestled to the ground and dragged from the room.

The second shoe also barely missed the President. Bush joked about it, saying, "That was a size 10 shoe he threw at me." While it's true that it is undesirable and embarrassing for the US President to have a pair of shoes thrown at him, possibly it would provide us well to be looking at what he has done in the last seven years to not only cause this to happen, but to cause citizens of his own country to find humour in it, and to wish that he'd been hit with a shoe. He and his administration have caused the US humiliation and to lose face with much of the rest of the world.

Nevertheless, one has to acknowledge that Bush is good at dodging (shoes, facts, questions, the draft, impeachment and so on). He has pretty good reflexes for an old dude, but then he's possibly pretty nervous lately, wondering when the other shoe will drop! You would think the world would realize by now he is the best Dodge ball player out there, all seriousness aside, did you see his moves on TV? Pretty impressive! I wonder if the man who threw the shoes got them back?

One thing is for certain: This episode will inspire an entire new series of computer video games where the President has to dodge flying shoes. Somehow, I cannot help but see the bad guy in the game as being Bush.
Nasim Jamil Joy
Elephant Road, Dhaka

Celebration of Eid

It happens during the start of Ramadan and celebration of two Eids. Some people in Bangladesh start fasting two days earlier and celebrate Eid-ul-Fitr and Eid-ul-Azha, as claimed by them, keeping similitude with Saudi Arabia or international moon sighting committee also two days earlier. They have no respect for or faith on our own government decision and moon sighting committee.

A good number of wise people also expressed concurrence with them through the columns of newspapers. Might be any repudiation escaped my eyes or no one dared to say anything against it.

Though I had a number of questions in my mind, I did not like to make any ado with it. I thought the learned people of religion and the competent authorities for it would take up the matter and solve the problem once and for all. But it did not happen and the matter crept up to the extent that I got a tremendous jolt on 8 December 2008 listening to a sermon delivered by an Imam of most probably Malibag area of Dhaka city who observed Eid-ul-Azha on that day, a day earlier. The Imam meant to say that the majority people of this country are guilty of not fasting for two days, they miss the glorious night of Lailatul Qadr and keep fasting on Eid days.

If this is true then it is a very serious matter and who is to take the responsibility of it is a pertinent question. And if the Imam is wrong then what should we do? The story could be concluded here but I wish to put up the following questions:-

--Are there any concrete directives in the Holy Quran, Siha Sitta (six authentic books of Hadith) and agreed upon practices of Islam & or opinions of recognized Imams or Ulemas about starting of fasting and celebration of Eid on the same day all over the world? If not, then what is the guideline for it?

--If we leave aside the difference of time of China, Japan, England, America with Saudi Arabia and consider the case of Bangladesh only, then it should stand to at least two and a half hours. It means, those who maintain similarity with Saudi Arabia and I believe they must be maintaining it in all respect, obviously offer their prayers 2.50 hours later, start fasting 2.50 hours later and then observe Eid two days earlier (Otherwise they cannot do it). Think of taking Sehri at 7:00am, and performing other things accordingly!

--Now questions arise; do they offer prayers in time, start and break fasting in time as ordained in the Holy Quran? I don't mean to say, they are doing these wrong things living in Bangladesh but one thing I must mention that they might be missing one or two fasting days at the end of the Ramadan observing Eid-Fitr one or two days earlier and not performing the Eid-ul-Azha and Qurbani on proper days meant for them. Then who is right?

--This is not a conclusion itself but a starting point to come to a conclusion once and for all through proper discussions in right forums.
Molla A. Latif
Kapasia, Gazipur

Unemployment issue



In a study of "The 2008 World Factbook", it has been revealed that the total population of this country is 150,448,339 (July 2007 est.). But it is quite insightful to see that about 63.4% of this country's total population is in between the age of 15 to 64 years. This larger portion of people could be an asset for this country. But because of unemployment, they are in danger of being a burden on the economy.

Unemployment is turning into one of the major problems of our economy. According to ILO, Bangladesh is in the twelfth position among the top twenty countries in the world where unemployment is rising. In another estimate it has been shown that about every year 2.7 million young people are becoming eligible for job but only 0.7 million of them are getting employment. Now the number of people who are unemployed in the country is about 30 million. This figure is increasing at an alarming rate. According to ILO, currently this

rate is about 3.7 per cent. It has been forecast that by 2015, this figure would stand at about 60 million. If this scenario becomes a reality, it would be unbearable to live in this country, as there is a significant positive relationship between unemployment and crime.

The government must play the main role for reducing unemployment. I would like to put this issue as an agenda for the next government as they would come to power with the mandate of the people. If nothing unexpected happens in our country, the next parliamentary election is going to be held on 29 December 2008. Whichever party is going to win in the election should make a consistent long term plan of action in the very beginning of their tenure to tackle unemployment.

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